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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

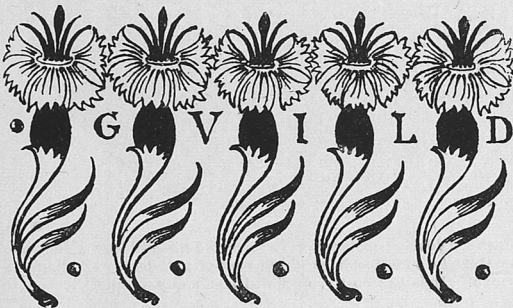
THE ARTS AND CRAFTS GUILD OF LONDON.

BY GLEESON WHITE.

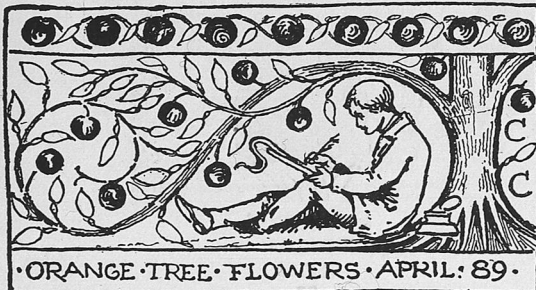


THOSE interested in decorative art, miss sorely the Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts this year. When the society was started it was with a distinct understanding that exhibitions were only to be held annually, if sufficient material could be collected. Of course for the first few years, a large amount of previous work was available; but now it would seem that the reservation of its promoters was prudent, and that the product of a current year is not always sufficient to yield a display noteworthy enough to sustain the high standard of excellence that marked its opening shows; hence its suspension.

As November has hitherto been devoted to the consideration of the new developments in domestic art, it will be timely to discuss the work of a society whose exhibits in former years were among the chief attractions at the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions. The so-called "Guild of Arts and Handicrafts" had its beginning in 1886-7, in a small Ruskin class held at Toynbee Hall, the center of University Extension work among the poor of the East End of London. In spite of ridicule and foreboding

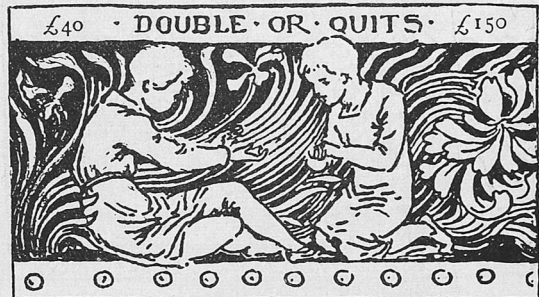


prophecies, a school was started to apply the theories of study in decorative art to practical and profitable manufactures. At the beginning the school was housed in a warehouse a few doors from Toynbee Hall, in Commercial street, E., and supported by voluntary contributions. In the first year £250 was supplied from without and £10 raised from within by fees, etc. The second year but £100 came from without, while £40 was found within; in the third year the outside and inside contributions for its support were, cash, £80. Now, the enterprise is well established, and in its new home at Essex House, Mile End Road,



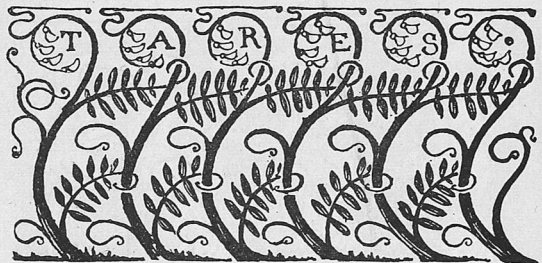
bids fair not merely to become a self-supporting concern, but to exercise distinct and healthy influence on the various arts it fosters. That it has been called the school of a hobby, that it has been accused of being merely a dilettante effort to be a pretty and petty effort to supply æstheticism to the East End at the cost of the West End, will be of little consequence, if its future be as full of performance as its present is full of promise.

Its idea in design being founded on precedents of the best schools of former ages, is not to the taste of many people who insist that this "so-called nineteenth century" shall always be ready to offer entirely new ideas in design of all sorts. The beginning of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, the first efforts of William Morris, met with similar objections—that they were



merely slavish attempts to reproduce old fashions; yet the historian and antiquarian of future ages will find no difficulty in identifying the work of the Victorian epoch, much as it may appear to imitate earlier ones. The indefinable touch that a true artist imparts to his work is just that which removes it from a tame copy and gives it a life of its own, however it may reflect the spirit of former productions. No student of architectural decoration in America can avoid recognizing what he calls the "Stanford White" touch, whenever he sees it; yet that accomplished designer is singularly faithful in his reproduction of details used over and over again.

The type of the design that holds sway at the Guild of Arts and Handicrafts may be imagined from the drawings that accompany this paper, which are taken from the Transactions of the Guild Vol. I, a book that in printing and "get up" generally is itself a work of art, and one that book-lovers should prize. The names of the artists responsible for these are not given; but in attributing many of them to the pen of Mr. C. R. Ashbee, the projector and director of the school, we shall



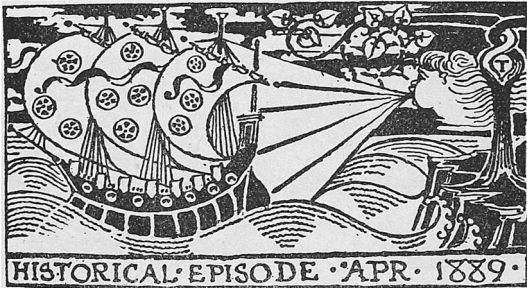
probably not be far wrong. Among those who have assisted this enthusiastic leader in his efforts, by lectures given to the guild, we find the names of Holman Hunt, Walter Crane, Edmund Gorse, Alma Tadema, William Morris, Lewis F. Day, and many other prominent artists and writers. In the volume referred to six of the lectures are reprinted, occasionally with facsimiles of the illustrations introduced to explain various parts of the speaker's argument.

With regard to the class of work produced by the Guild. In the examples of repoussé metal they have exhibited conventional floral forms, often repeated, as in the device of the Guild—were very prominent. Ships and fish supplied the motives for many large plaques. In their cabinet work, a free use of let-

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tering for decorative purposes, and of painted ornament on plain finished natural wood, were frequently the sole ornamentation beyond the excellent chosen mouldings and the well ordered balance of the main features of the design. Gesso is a favorite material with them, and capably employed. In their metal work, a mixture of brass or copper treated in great simple masses, with wrought ironwork more elaborately shaped, gives a certain individual *cachet* to their productions: The prizes are distinctly low, and considering the high artistic quality and excellent craft displayed in their wares, one is astonished at the moderate cost of most of them.

Although so full of the Renaissance and Gothic feeling there is also a strong influence of Oriental art apparent in some of



their designs. Among those now reproduced, the "Pinks" of the guild, and the Tares, have quite an eastern convention in their lines. The glue-pot, with its legend, is a playful device that suggests some of the more sober work in the same class. The craft of the guild gives an idea of some of their plaques, where, however, the details are kept open and more suited to the material. The original of this device is in gesso, illuminated and gilded. The other panels show pleasing treatment of figure decoration simply and well balanced.

A PICTURE may be well chosen, but its framing may neutralize its effect and render it a distracting object. Hence the buyer's care must not relax or her taste and sense of the fitness of things be "off guard" till she has selected her frame. A frame should never be more striking than the picture. It should accent the picture, and yet in itself be unobtrusive. It should soften the lines of the wall around the picture and focus the eye upon it.

Oil paintings should be framed in gold, silver or bronze. A

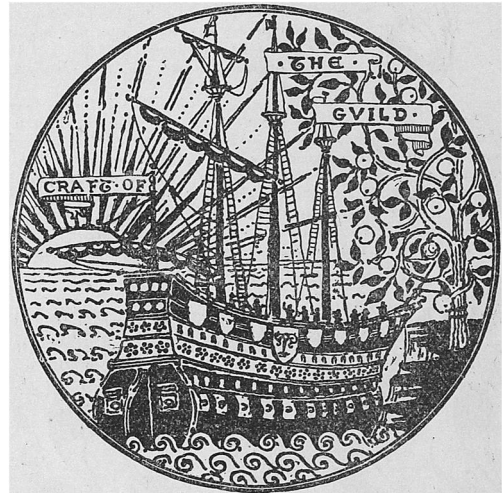


frame of white and gold is best for a water-color, while engravings and etchings look best in frames of natural wood, either polished or varnished, but never gilded. Photographs can be framed in natural wood or modest flat gilt or bronze frames, according to the subject and the tone of the picture. Soft gray or green-tinted mats are the best for pictures in general, throwing the picture back from the glass and softening the effect, but tinted mats may occasionally be used. A dark blue mat, when the picture is blue in tone, or a wine-colored, or rarely a silver or

gilded one, may be very effective, but should only be used cautiously. The frame for an oil-painting should never be flat, but always thicker at the outer edge, to throw the picture back and increase the perspective in which it is best seen, and harmonize it with the walls. Sometimes an oil painting is of modest coloring and low tone, and is most effectively framed in dark crimson or dull blue velvet, the pile of the velvet softening the picture yet imparting a luminous and rich effect, which the glitter of a golden frame almost wholly absorbs to itself.

Water-colors are often harmoniously framed in tints which carry out the delicate prevailing color in themselves, especially in landscapes and marines. The mat can often be the palest tint of cream, pink, buff, atmospheric gray, or sea-green, while the frame itself may repeat the tint, with delicate lines of gold, or be made of simple white and gilt molding.

The gilded frame is delusive, often being nothing but the cheapest imitation in plaster of Paris thinly gilt. This soon drops to pieces. In good gilded molding there are two kinds worth buying. The French is costly, and has two layers of gold-



leaf and a coating of lacquer varnish. This will last a lifetime. The German molding has a single coat of gold-leaf, and then the varnish. It is less costly, and will last many years.

MANY of the newest sofa cushions are made of beautiful brocades with the pattern embroidered in silks, chenille and gold thread. Some exquisite designs are worked in tapestry stitch, and others in tent stitch on a watered gold or silver ground. The stitches are worked on canvas, laid on the watered material, which is drawn away afterwards. Some have panels of silk, or even lace on silk, carried diagonally between embroidery. Basket stitch as a grounding has been brought out of late, and very large cushions are the fashion.

